



Unit 3C

## YAHWISM AND BAALISM IN ISRAEL & JUDAH

QUITE A FEW BIBLICAL TEXTS ARE DEVOTED TO TELLING STORIES ABOUT THE ISRAELITES (AND, later, the Judeans) either adding the worship of the Canaanite/Phoenician god Baal to the worship of Yahweh or forsaking the worship of Yahweh altogether in favor of worshiping Baal. Repeated Israelite worship of Baal is one of the forces driving the overall storyline of Judges 1–16, and the theme pops up again and again in the story of monarchic Israel and Judah.

This preparation guide will help you learn:

- the basic sweep of the storyline of the independent kingdoms of Israel and Judah;
- some of the characteristics of the deity Baal; and
- some of the biblical responses to Israelite Baal-worship.

### ☑ CHRONOLOGY OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

When narrating events that happened after the division of the kingdom following Solomon's death, the Deuteronomist cuts back and forth between Israel and Judah. For the most part, Israel receives greater attention in the last few chapters of 1 Kings and the first few chapters of 2 Kings, and Judah receives greater attention after that.

Please note that many kings have been left off of the timeline below, accounting for the gaps in time. Even this bare-bones timeline is rather "crowded" with unfamiliar names and dates. The most important kings, prophets, and events for purposes of this course are highlighted in boldface (it's still a lot of people, but this is a character-driven story). Many of the events and people listed in the timeline will come into greater focus in future preparation guides and class sessions.



EGYPT	JUDAH	ISRAEL	MESOPOTAMIA
Shishak	Rehoboam (928–911) Shishak's invasion (925)  Jehoshaphat (867–846)  Athaliah (842–836) Jehoash (836–798)	Jeroboam I (928–907)  Omri (882–871) Samaria founded Ahab (873–852) Elijah (prophet) Micaiah (prophet) Elisha (prophet) J(eh)oram son of Ahab (851–842) Jehu son of Nimshi (842–814) Jehoash (800–788) Jeroboam II (788–747)	Shalmaneser III (858–824) Battle of Qarqar (853)  Adad-nirari III (811–783)
	Ahaz (743–727 or 735–715) Isaiah (prophet) Hezekiah (727–698 or 715–687)  Manasseh (698–642 or 687–642)	Hoshea (732–722)  Samaria captured (722)	Tiglath-pileser III (745–727) Shalmaneser V (727–722) Sargon II (722–705) Sennacherib (705–681) Esar-haddon (681–669) Ashurbanipal (669–627)
Neco II (610–595)	Josiah (639–609) Jeremiah (prophet) Jehoahaz (609) Jehoiakim (608–598) Jehoiachin/Jeconiah (597) Zedekiah (597–586) Jerusalem captured (586)		Nineveh captured (612)  Battle of Carchemish (605) Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562)

## ☑ THE CANAANITE DEITY BAAL

To learn some of the basic characteristics and stories about the god Baal (remember to pronounce his name *bah-ahl*, with the accent on the *ahl*), please read the following excerpt from LaMoine DeVries's article on Baal in the *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* (Mercer University Press, 1990), pp. 79–80.

The Canaanite god, Baal, is referred to in both the OT and the Ras Shamra/Ugaritic texts. The Ras Shamra tablets, which date to about the fifteenth century B.C.E., describe Baal as a weather or storm god. The storm god's role is reflected in the sculptured representations of Baal who is featured as a man equipped as a warrior, with a thunderbolt as a spear in his left hand, an uplifted mace in his right hand, a short kilt around his waist and thighs, and a helmet with horns. The horns were symbolic reminders of the bull, Baal's sacred animal and symbol of fertility, and of Baal's role as the god of fertility. Baal was one of a number of gods comprising the Canaanite pantheon. He is identified as the son of Dagon, the fertility god of the Philistines (Judg 16:23; 1 Sam 5:2); however, El was generally recognized as the father of the gods of the pantheon. Baal is also referred to as Hadad or Baal-Hadad, though Hadad, a semitic storm god, and Baal are usually recognized as separate deities. As a storm god, Baal was described as "the rider of the clouds" reminiscent of a description of Yahweh (Ps 68:4). Baal was also called "the Prince." Baal was associated with Mount Zaphon. In the Ras Shamra texts, Anath, described as "the virgin Anath," was both sister and consort of Baal.

According to the Ugaritic texts two stories played an important role in shaping Canaanite thought about Baal and his role and achievements as a god. These were the stories of Baal and Yamm, the sea, and



*The Canaanite/Phoenician god Baal*

Baal and Mot, Death. In these accounts Baal is featured as a god who faced extremely powerful destructive forces, confronted the challenge at hand, appeared to be near defeat at the heart of the confrontation, but in the end emerged victorious.

The story of Baal's encounter with the dragon, Yamm, highlights Baal's role as a god who confronted and defeated the monster who was the source of chaos. The theme of chaos, prevalent in the many accounts from the ancient Near East, also appears in Gen 1:1–2 in which the Spirit of God, the ruah Elohim, established order in the midst of chaos. In the Baal-Yamm account Baal emerged victorious and Yamm was confined to his realm, the Sea.

The story of Baal's encounter with Mot, Death, highlights Baal's role as a god of fertility. The story features the cycle the Canaanites believed Baal passed through each year. In the encounter baal was defeated by Mot, sent to the underworld—the realm of the dead—and eventually reappeared victorious over Mot. The various features of the cycle correspond to what happened annually in nature: Baal's descent to the underworld corresponded to that period in which rain did not fall and the land was not productive; Baal's reappearance corresponded to the coming of spring, that time of year when the rains returned and the land became fertile and productive again. Accounts of this nature provided the focus for the celebrations of an annual New Year festival, a festival apparently celebrated by many cultures in the ancient Near East.

Please note that Yamm, the name of Baal's enemy, means “sea” in the ancient Semitic languages. Yamm also goes by the name “Nahar,” or “river.”

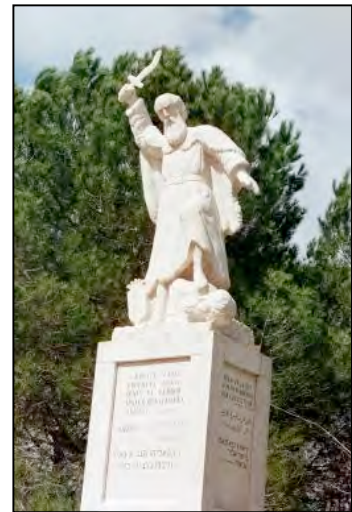
## ☑ YAHWISM AND BAALISM IN MONARCHICAL ISRAEL

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him as king. Rehoboam, however, was not able to hold “all Israel” together. The majority of tribes (normally described in the Bible as all the tribes except for Judah, although sometimes Benjamin is still grouped with Judah) rejected Rehoboam's reign and formed their own kingdom, which retained the name “Israel.” Rehoboam's kingdom thereafter was called “Judah.” Baalism took a firm hold in Israel before it found footing in Judah, so for this class session we will focus on Israel.

To learn how Baalism became an official state religion in Israel, please read 1 Kings 16:29–34. This paragraph will introduce you to **King Ahab** and his wife **Jezebel**, the royal couple responsible for bringing Phoenician-style Baalism to **Samaria**, the royal city of the northern kingdom of Israel. Then please read 1 Kings 18:17–40, a famous story about the prophet **Elijah**'s opposition to Ahab's Baalism. Note that Ahab appears later to have changed his ways and rededicated himself to the worship of the LORD God of Israel; 1 Kings 21:27–29 describes his humility before God after a different offense, and 1 Kings 22 depicts Ahab as consulting Yahwistic prophets rather than Baalists.

A couple of generations later, a soldier named **Jehu** seized control of the Israelite throne and is credited in the Bible with wiping out Ahab's family (except a few who had moved south to Judah). Please read 2 Kings 10:18–28, which describes Jehu's attempts to eradicate Baalism from Israel.

Almost a hundred years later, however, during the lifetime of the prophet **Hosea**, many Israelites were still (or again) worshipping Baal instead of or alongside of Yahweh. Hosea took a strong stand against Baalism, illustrating his message in a strange and shocking way. Please read Hosea 1–2 to learn more about Hosea's anti-Baalist



*This modern statue of Elijah's triumph over the prophets of Baal stands outside the Carmelite monastery on Mount Carmel. Photo © 2001 Peter Blackburn.*

message (you will need to know who **Gomer**, **Lo-ammi**, and **Lo-ruhamah** are to fully understand this message).

Hosea's message includes the following line: "On that day, says the LORD, you will call me 'my husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal'" (Hosea 2:16). This remarkable statement implies that some Israelites were using the name "Baal" as a title or name for Yahweh! To see how this state of affairs might have come about, please review what you learned about Baal from the *Mercer Dictionary* article above, and then read Psalm 29 and Habakkuk 3:3b–15.

## CLASS SESSION PREVIEW

During the class session, Dr. Heard will:

- help you understand the characteristics of Baal;
- help you understand, from the texts you read, why Baal-worship was so attractive to ancient Israelites and threatening to the biblical writers; and
- help you understand how David, Jeroboam son of Nebat, and Ahab serve as "paradigms" within the Deuteronomistic History.

## TEST COMPETENCY CHECKLIST

Before taking the Unit 3 test, please make sure that you:

- understand the storyline of the reign of **King Ahab**, including his conflicts with **Elijah the Tishbite** and **Micaiah son of Imlah**; and who **Jezebel**, **Naboth**, **Je-hoshaphat**, and **Zedekiah son of Chenaanah** figure into the story of Ahab;
- know who **Hosea** is, when he lived, what he mostly preached about, and how his relationships with **Gomer**, **Lo-ruhamah**, and **Lo-ammi** illustrated his messages; and
- understand the general dynamics of Yahwism and Baalism in ancient Israel as discussed in the class lecture on this topic.

### SON OF WHO? A WHAT-ITE?

People in the ancient Near East did not have "last names" or "family names" like most modern individuals. Instead, if you needed to distinguish between two different biblical characters with the same name, you append their fathers' names or perhaps their home town. Thus, it is usually pretty important to memorize both the main name and the additional specification.

For two kings of a single kingdom who have the same name, modern interpreters often add a Roman numeral to the end of their name; thus, Jeroboam son of Nebat is also known as Jeroboam I. Please realize that this is a purely modern innovation, not biblical terminology.